

## MINISTRY AND ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE ORTHODOX RESPONSES TO *BEM*

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### PRECIS

This essay reviews the Orthodox churches' responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" document of the World Council of Churches, with a focus on Orthodox ecclesiological principles. It examines the responses in terms of laity vs. ordained ministry, the threefold pattern of ministry, the issue of apostolic succession, and the eucharist as it relates to ecclesiology. Analyzing the consistency of the responses in relation to the *BEM* statement, the author tests the validity of the eucharistic ecclesiological model that Orthodox theologians propose as their paradigm with their responses to *BEM*. He asks how the life of the church is to be understood and ordered such that the gospel may be spread and the community be built up in love, on the basis of the Orthodox reaction to the Lima document.

### Introduction

The Lima Statement on "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" has received much attention from the member churches of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission. It is a document that is "... the fruit of a 50-year process of study stretching back to the first Faith and Order Conference at Lausanne in 1927."<sup>1</sup> The official responses of the Orthodox churches to *BEM* have been most positive.<sup>2</sup> The accomplishment of *BEM*, as my own church has remarked, is that it "... situates ministry, as it does baptism and eucharist,

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<sup>1</sup>*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), Preface, p. viii. All subsequent references are to the "Ministry" section of this document (hereafter, *BEM*).

<sup>2</sup>Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM, Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" Text*, vol. 2, Faith and Order Paper 132 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986); and vol. 3, Faith and Order Paper 135 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), contain the

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within a broad ecclesial context.”<sup>3</sup> It is because of the ecclesial context that I find *BEM*, as well as the responses to *BEM* from the Orthodox churches, an important “icon” to provide a fuller understanding of what it means to be “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” Some of these Orthodox responses clearly express the ecclesiological importance of *BEM*. We find the following comments, for example: “. . . a step towards greater catholicity, i. e. greater proximity to the apostolic tradition, to the faith and practice of the early church”<sup>4</sup> and “. . . it shows in a concrete way that the World Council of Churches is again concentrating on the fundamental questions of the Christian faith and of the unity of the church.”<sup>5</sup>

In an article from a leading Russian Orthodox ecumenist, *BEM* is exalted above other ecumenical documents. Archbishop (now Metropolitan) Kirill wrote: “. . . the *BEM* document reflects a very high degree of agreement reached on important questions of faith among the widest possible range of ecumenical audiences with official representatives.”<sup>6</sup>

It is because of this positive affirmation of *BEM* by the Orthodox churches, that *BEM*, as well as the responses by the Orthodox, can be utilized as a template to understand contemporary Orthodox thought concerning ministry and ecclesiology. In the *BEM* statement the drafters write in the section on ministry: “A common answer needs to be found to the following question: How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community may be built up in love?”<sup>7</sup> It is this question that will be the focus for my examination of the official responses to *BEM* by the Orthodox Church. It is one thing to criticize a document of such significance as *BEM* but another to address the primary question the document wishes to address.

My purpose will be to answer the question posed by *BEM* in the following way: How do the Orthodox in their responses to *BEM* show a model for the church “to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?” I will examine the responses of the Orthodox under the following headings: lay vs. ordained ministry, the threefold pattern of ministry, apostolic succession, and the eucharist as it relates to ecclesiology.

Orthodox responses, which will be abbreviated as follows: from vol. 2, Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC), and Finnish Orthodox Church (FOC); from vol. 3, Romanian Orthodox Church (ROMOC) and Orthodox Church in America (OCA). Other Orthodox responses, which will not be used in this essay because their contents do not directly pertain to ecclesiology, include: the Church of Greece, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, and the Inter-Orthodox Symposium on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry. Nor are the responses of the Oriental Orthodox Churches reviewed or used in this essay.

<sup>3</sup>OCA, #18, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>ROC, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>FOC, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>Archbishop Kirill, “The Significance and Status of *BEM* in the Ecumenical Movement,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (Summer, 1985): 181, emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup>*BEM*, I, #6, p. 20.

Therefore, the primary portion of the *BEM* document that will be of concern here will be sections II and III and paragraph 35, in light of the Orthodox responses and my own observations.

### *Lay vs. Ordained Ministry*

In the six-volume series, *Churches Respond to BEM*, there are nine Orthodox responses, some more comprehensive than others; however, we find common themes within the responses concerning ministry. For instance, a distinction is made between the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of all believers,<sup>8</sup> and it appears that the Orthodox understand the ordering of the church in two distinct ministries: that of ordained priesthood, and a lay priesthood or "priesthood of all believers." This simplification is complicated with the insistence of the Orthodox, especially the Bulgarians, that ministry is to be understood as a sacrament.<sup>9</sup> Critical questions may legitimately be asked about this line of reasoning as we push the discussion forward. For example, if all "ministry" should be seen as sacramental, needing validation through ordination, can there be such a thing as "lay" ministry in the Orthodox Church? If "ministry" is only defined in relation to the ordained, what about the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila as found in scripture (Acts 18:18ff.; 1 Cor. 16:19)? Further, a concern for the Orthodox has to do with the sacramental nature of the ordained priesthood.<sup>10</sup>

The question that begs to be asked is why it is important for the Orthodox to stress the sacramental understanding of ministry. What does the Orthodox Church teach about lay vs. ordained ministry? The late Alexander Schmemmann inferred and claimed that all of life is a sacrament. Does this not include the lay ministry? Is this not the position that Schmemmann raised in his discussion of baptism and the eucharist?<sup>11</sup> If baptism integrates us into the church, having its full actualization in the eucharist, it would seem that all ministry, not just the ordained ministry, is sacramental.<sup>12</sup> Is there a difference between ordained sacrament and lay sacrament? Further, the Orthodox Church in America, in its official report on "Stewardship and Lay Ministries" at its Seventh All-American Council, implied the sacramental nature of lay ministry.<sup>13</sup> Within

<sup>8</sup>ROMOC, p. 11; BOC, #1-2, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>"Wherever the document speaks of ministry, it does not mean it as a sacrament, unlike the Orthodox teaching which understands it as a sacrament" (BOC, p. 20, note). See also BOC, #1-4, p. 21; and Kirill, "Significance," p. 193.

<sup>10</sup>BOC, #5, p. 22; ROMOC, pp. 9-13; OCA, #22-26, pp. 22-24.

<sup>11</sup>Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 115ff.

<sup>12</sup>Schmemmann wrote: "We are Baptized so that we may receive the Holy Spirit so that we may become living members of the Body of Christ, growing within the Church into the fullness of Christ's stature" (ibid., p. 116).

<sup>13</sup>"We advocate and seek to promote the ministries of the laity as outward expressions of an inner life with God, not for a self-serving purpose, but as a means of witness and service to God,

the Orthodox Church in America in the past ten years there actually seems to be more definition given to "lay ministry" than to ordained ministry.

Moving from the general sacramental understanding of ministry, the Orthodox responses to *BEM* link the sacramental nature of the priesthood with the question of "valid eucharistic ministry." The Church of Russia remarks: "The text has actually left out the most important question of who has the right to celebrate the eucharist. Recognition of the validity of the sacrament is possible only if the right answer is given to this question."<sup>14</sup> Further, we find that "the ordained minister is by definition consecrated to *ministry*."<sup>15</sup> Does the sacramental nature of the priesthood mean a legal right to "ministry" or a seal of validity upon such ministry? If the question is posed concerning the topic of lay vs. ordained ministry, we would have to ask: Do the Orthodox really believe in a "ministry of the laity"? In the Orthodox responses to *BEM*, their answer to this question is at best ambiguous. The answer by the Orthodox may in fact approve a certain amount of clericalism that would supervise lay ministries.<sup>16</sup>

Although there is agreement concerning the image of the church as the Body of Christ made up of many parts, as stated in *BEM*, the Orthodox nevertheless wish to make a firm distinction in their *BEM* responses between the role of the ordained and the role of the faithful. We find this in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church's response in a most pointed manner when it states of *BEM*: "no difference is made between the hierarchical ministry and the various ministries of the lay people."<sup>17</sup>

The problem is that for the Orthodox the sacramental nature of ministry reflects an ecclesiology; this is why they say that there is not a problem concerning the mutual recognition of ministry but, rather, the recognition of the church as church.<sup>18</sup> As this relates to lay vs. ordained ministries, this problem was well expressed by the Bulgarians: "What we Orthodox are impressed by is the fact that in the entire chapter on ministry there is no word about the ministry as being a God-established blessed sacrament and that no difference is made between the hierarchical ministry and the various ministries of the lay people in the church."<sup>19</sup>

as a reflection of our obedience to Christ's commandments, and as a response to his call for discipleship and stewardship" (Council Hearing E2, Department of Stewardship and Lay Ministries, "Ministry of Men and Women in the Church," Denise Jillions, chairperson, at the Seventh All-American Council, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 21-26, 1983, p. 2).

<sup>14</sup>ROC, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup>OCA, #21, p. 21, emphasis in original.

<sup>16</sup>"It is unclear who must take the initiative for developing these opportunities (lay ministries) on the parish level and who will be responsible for following through. In other words, leadership is a problem and an unfair share of the burden will fall on the overworked parish priest until there is a serious effort to develop leadership positions for qualified lay persons who can help the priest organize and oversee some of these activities" (Council Hearing E2, "Ministry of Men and Women in the Church," p. 2).

<sup>17</sup>BOC, #1, p. 21. See also FOC, p. 27; ROMOC, p. 13; OCA, #26, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup>See ROC, p. 9; BOC, #5, p. 23; FOC, p. 28; ROMOC, p. 11; OCA, #25, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup>BOC, #1, p. 21.

### *The Threefold Pattern of Ministry*

Moving from the unique apostolic witness, the Orthodox see the apostolic ministry as visible in the threefold pattern of ordained ministry from the Second Testament to the present. Although there is strong emphasis given to the threefold pattern, *BEM* also admits that no single pattern is described in the Second Testament. However, it recommends that:

... the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it. Historically, it is true to say, the threefold ministry became the generally accepted pattern in the Church in the early centuries and is still retained today by many churches. In the fulfillment of their mission and service the churches need people who in different ways express and perform the tasks of the ordained ministry in its diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal aspects and functions.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the Orthodox would agree with *BEM* that the apostolic ministry can today be seen in the threefold pattern, but *BEM* describes this pattern precisely in terms of tasks, aspects, and functions, and this is less than what the Orthodox want to say about it.

The Orthodox in their responses stress that the threefold pattern of bishop, priest, and deacon is not merely a result of historical circumstance but also an expressed ontological manifestation of the faith of the church and, therefore, of its order. This threefold pattern is emphasized by the Orthodox as not solely functional, but they stress that "the bishop (or the priest) is the icon of Christ and not only his representative."<sup>21</sup> This opinion has recently been given prominence by some Orthodox in discussion of the question concerning the "male character of the Priesthood."<sup>22</sup> However, here in the responses it is used to emphasize an ontological link between Christ and the bishop/priest. This iconic representation could be more clearly stated in the responses; however, it seems to be linked with the episcopacy as expressing the visible continuity of the apostolic faith and unity in the churches.<sup>23</sup>

The responses distinguish not only the three orders within the threefold pattern of ministry but also a fundamental difference between ordained and nonordained ministry.<sup>24</sup> One of the strongest statements concerning the

<sup>20</sup>*BEM*, III, #22, pp. 24-25.

<sup>21</sup>FOC, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup>See Thomas Hopko, ed., *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup>See ROC, OCA, and BOC. Although we do not find this position clearly articulated in the responses, it seems to echo St. Cyprian, especially in the following: "... we who are bishops and exercise authority in the Church—so as to demonstrate that the episcopal power is one and undivided too. Let none mislead the brethren with a lie; let none corrupt the true content of the faith by faithless perversion of the truth. The authority of the bishops forms a unity of which each holds his part in its totality" (*The Unity of the Catholic Church*, Ancient Christian Writers 25 [New York and Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1957], pp. 47-48).

<sup>24</sup>See ROMOC, p. 13.

ordained ministry in the Orthodox responses is that *BEM* "... acknowledges the importance of the priesthood instituted by Christ for the church as constitutive."<sup>25</sup> If the ordained priesthood rather than, for example, the episcopate is constitutive for the church, this needs to be developed further, since it would be an ecclesiological position of significance. This constitutive character of the ordained priesthood needs to be contextualized, moreover, within the ontologically sacramental understanding of the apostolic faith as held by the Orthodox. For this position the responses juxtapose the difference between ordained ministry and the "ministry of all believers."<sup>26</sup> Although a fuller development may be warranted in the responses, we nevertheless find the following: "While 'every charism serves to assemble and build up the body of Christ', each does so in a different way, the charism of the ordained minister doing so precisely by revealing these diverse charisms as forming *one* body."<sup>27</sup>

This would seem to be consistent with the Orthodox conviction that the episcopacy is the unifying body within the Church, as well as the essential link with the one charisma given to the apostles that is transmitted through ordination to the present day.<sup>28</sup> Yet, what I find to be interesting in the Orthodox responses is that, although the threefold pattern is emphasized, only the role of the episcopacy and priesthood is focused upon. The question I now ask is: How essential is the diaconate in the threefold pattern? If it is so essential, what, then, is unique and shared among all three? This needs to be explored further, since these responses, taken at face value, concern only the orders of episcopate and priesthood.

The concern of the Orthodox is not the outward expression of the ministry but the real function — and, thus, also the essence — of that ministry. To quote the Bulgarians: "The ordained minister transmits invisibly, but really, God's blessing to the faithful through the sacraments, established in the church."<sup>29</sup> The question of the essence of ministry pushes the question far deeper than the role or function of bishop, priest, and deacon. I think it proper to emphasize that the functions of bishop, priest, and deacon as an expression of the "essence" of the church for the Orthodox must be established, insofar as possible, from a consideration of the Orthodox ordination rites, although on their own they do not fully express the Orthodox understanding.

The Orthodox prayer for the ordination of the deacon refers to Stephen, the first Martyr, without a specific reference to what the deacon does, as expressed in the following:

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 9; see also BOC, #2-4, pp. 21-22.

<sup>26</sup>See note 8, above.

<sup>27</sup>OCA, #20, p. 21, emphasis in original.

<sup>28</sup>See, e.g., Kallistos Ware, "Patterns of Episcopacy in the Early Church and Today: An Orthodox View," in Peter Moore, ed., *Bishops, But What Kind?* (London: SPCK, 1982); and J. Robert Wright, "The Origins of the Episcopate and Episcopal Ministry in the Early Church," in J. Robert Wright, ed., *On Being a Bishop: Papers on Episcopacy from the Moscow Consultation, 1992* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1993), pp. 10-32.

<sup>29</sup>BOC, #3, p. 21.

O God our Savior, who by thine incorruptible voice didst appoint unto thine Apostles the law of the Diaconate, and didst manifest the first Martyr, Stephen, to be of the same; and didst proclaim him the first who would exercise the office of a Deacon, as it is written in thy Holy Gospel: Whosoever desireth to be first among you, let him be your servant . . .<sup>30</sup>

It seems that the role and function of the deacon is to serve, yet there is no clear function or essential description of the deacon's ministry given here in the ordination rite. What is the organic function of the diaconate in the Orthodox Church, and how does its role and function differ essentially from that of the priesthood? The function and role of the diaconate needs further exploration in *BEM*, just as it does in the Orthodox responses to that document.

Examining the Orthodox ordination rite of the priest, we see a clearer understanding of his function and role. We find, for example, the following: ". . . that he may be worthy to stand in innocency before thine Altar; to proclaim the Gospel of thy kingdom; to minister the word of thy truth; to offer unto thee spiritual gifts and sacrifices; to renew thy people through the laver of regeneration."<sup>31</sup> It is clear that the priest has the function to preach and to maintain a sacramental life in the community.

The Orthodox prayer for the ordination of a bishop indicates not only a sacramental role and a role of teacher but also for the bishop to be, in essence, the representative and iconic image of Christ's ministry:

O Lord our God, who, forasmuch as it is impossible for the nature of man to endure the Essence of the Godhead, in thy providence hast instituted for us teachers of like nature with ourselves, to maintain thine Altar, that they may offer unto thee sacrifice and oblation for all thy people: Do thou, the same Lord, make this man also, who hath been proclaimed a steward of the episcopal grace, to be an imitator of thee, the true Shepherd, who didst lay down thy life for thy sheep: to be a leader of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a reproof of the unwise, a teacher of the young, a lamp to the world . . .<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the ordination prayers do not fully express the understanding of the role and function, much less of the "essence," of the bishop, priest, and deacon in the Orthodox Church. Archbishop Kirill raises the hope that *BEM* ". . . should become an impetus for the inner theological and liturgical renewal" for many churches,<sup>33</sup> and I would think that the Orthodox prayers of ordination, especially to the diaconate, would benefit from his concern. The prayers nevertheless underline the sacramental connectedness of the orders.

The question of the threefold ministry in *BEM* is a question of role or func-

<sup>30</sup>Isabel Florence Hapgood, ed., *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of New York and all North America, 1965), p. 313.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>33</sup>Kirill, "Significance," p. 182.

tion. *BEM* outlines the development of the threefold pattern, and, it says further, this pattern is in need of reform.<sup>34</sup> For the Orthodox in their responses, however, the question of the threefold pattern becomes a question of ontology, as they did not clearly distinguish between the role or function of bishop, priest, or deacon, although they claimed that the function of the bishop is not just one of oversight but also a sacramental sign of integration and a focus of communion.<sup>35</sup> I would have to agree with Thomas Hopko, who wrote:

If the Orthodox are clear about affirming the ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon in the Church, we are certainly not clear about the relationship of these ministries to each other, and to the ministries of all of God's people, either in past history or at the present time. How "fluid" were and are these titles and terms? What specific service is called for in these ministries? What "authority" do they possess, and how is it to be actualized in the Church (and in "the world") in a God-befitting manner? Why do the traditional scriptural and canonical qualifications exist, and what is their significance and relevance today? Is the manner in which these offices now operate in Orthodoxy, as well as the manner in which they are understood and explained in our theology, particularly in the school manuals, truly representative of authentic Orthodox theology and practice — not to mention the points made on these issues in *BEM*?<sup>36</sup>

The above questions by Hopko are not critically answered in the Orthodox responses. Nor do the rites of ordination clarify the question. If the threefold pattern is truly an ontological link between Christ and the bishop/priest/deacon, the questions raised above need to be answered.

### *Apostolic Succession*

For the Orthodox, the expression of apostolic succession — or the continuity of the faith of the apostles — is linked to the function of the bishop. The bishop in his person is the expression of the visible unity of the church. The Orthodox believe that God bestows the unique gift upon the one ordained so as "to bring the diverse gifts of the community into unity as one body."<sup>37</sup> In addition, "We Orthodox insist that the succession of the apostolic tradition is actualized in the church through the laying-on of hands of the episcopate in apostolic succession."<sup>38</sup> Thus, the Orthodox responses to *BEM* concerning ministry affirm that a continuity of apostolic faith is expressed in the unity of the church in the person of the bishop. This must be seen, moreover, within

<sup>34</sup>*BEM*, III, #24, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup>ROC, p. 9; FOC, p. 28; ROMOC, p. 3; OCA, #23, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup>Thomas Hopko, "Tasks Facing the Orthodox in the 'Reception' Process of *BEM*," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (Summer, 1985): 244.

<sup>37</sup>OCA, #22, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup>OCA, #24, p. 23.



the sacramental understanding of ministry, which is deeply rooted in the Orthodox Church's theology of the eucharist.<sup>39</sup>

To begin to unfold the understanding of apostolic succession as expressed in the Orthodox responses to *BEM*, we find, first, that "[t]he fullness of the apostolic faith cannot be realized in the church without the threefold ministry."<sup>40</sup> Second, we find, as noted previously: "We Orthodox insist that the succession of the apostolic tradition is actualized in the church through the laying-on of hands of the episcopate in apostolic succession."<sup>41</sup> One may conclude, therefore, that for the Orthodox the notion of apostolic succession or apostolic faith is a matter of sacramental ontology, in which all other sacramental actions must find their origin. Are the Orthodox claiming, though, that "the Orthodox faith," not its sacramental manifestation, is "sacrament" *par excellence*? If so, such a position seems not to allow for any dialogue but, rather, to suggest that all others who deviate from the One Faith are in error. What place is assigned to the sacramental action of the laying-on of hands?

It seems, further, that within the Orthodox responses their authors interchange apostolic faith, apostolic tradition, and apostolic succession. This becomes confusing especially when the claim is made that the threefold pattern of ministry has ". . . an 'inner logic' at work . . . and not simply 'the particular historical circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries' referred to in the Lima Statement."<sup>42</sup> It would seem that the Orthodox are saying that the apostolic tradition arose from the historical circumstance, whereas apostolic faith is somehow ontological to the community of apostles that lived with Christ and share in the confession of Peter.

The question of the continuity of the apostolic succession with the fact of ordination is at best implicit and nowhere documented in *BEM*. It states: "As Christ chose and sent the apostles, Christ continues through the Holy Spirit to choose and call persons into the ordained ministry."<sup>43</sup> Is this insinuation of *BEM* meant to imply a particular transmission or continuity from the apostles to the ordained ministry, and, if so, what is it? There is a difference of emphasis when *BEM* ceases to speak of the apostles and starts to speak of the ordained. The ordained ministers are no longer eye-witnesses to the resurrection. Therefore, can we agree with *BEM*'s assertion that their ordained ministers' "responsibility . . . is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry"?<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup>"In the eucharist the Church is revealed as the sacramental image of Christ [trópos]. In this sacramental image his God-man person exists and acts in the history beginning from Pentecost and ending with Parousia. On the other hand, it may be said that the eucharist creates the Church, since it is in the eucharist that the Holy Spirit makes the Church the Body of Christ" (Kirill, "Significance," pp. 186-187, emphasis in original).

<sup>40</sup>FOC, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup>OCA, #24, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>*BEM*, II, #11, p. 21.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., II, #13, p. 22.

Using this statement as a description of leadership in the Christian communities, *BEM* by these words does establish a similarity of ordained ministry to apostles that in one sense can be called a continuity.

That the relationship of apostles to the ordained ministry is one of continuity in witness and leadership can be and has been put by more than one leading Orthodox writer:<sup>45</sup>

The Apostles represent a *link* between Christ and the Church and form part of a historical process with a decisive and perhaps *normative* role to play. Thus the idea of mission and that of historical process go together in the New Testament and lead to a scheme of continuity in a linear movement: God sends Christ — Christ sends the Apostles — The Apostles transmit the message of Christ by establishing Churches and Ministers.<sup>46</sup>

This position as elucidated by John Zizioulas is evidenced in *BEM* II, #8-11. This explanation of continuity in witness and leadership may well be what the Bulgarian Orthodox had to say about "faith" when they responded to *BEM*, "The faith of the church through the ages includes the fullness of the holy scripture and holy Tradition as they had been handed down to us by the apostles."<sup>47</sup>

Such an understanding of the continuity of faith would not be disputed by the Orthodox, but, when we ask how this is to be translated and understood in terms of church order, we come to a major ecclesiological issue: How can we visibly see the ministry of the apostles in the ordained ministry of the church today? In *BEM* III, "The Forms of the Ordained Ministry," we find a historical summary of the development of the function of bishops, presbyters, and deacons; however, in II, "The Church and the Ordained Ministry," we find a distinction made between the ministry of the apostles and that of the ordained. What is this difference? The statement claims: "It can be said that the apostles prefigure both the Church as a whole and the persons within it who are entrusted with the specific authority and responsibility. The role of the apostles as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ is unique and unrepeatable."<sup>48</sup> This unique function as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, therefore, is seen by *BEM* as uniquely apostolic witness, but in the Orthodox responses there is a further development.

The following can be deduced from the Orthodox responses to *BEM* concerning the relationship of apostolic to ordained ministry. First, both are God-given. The apostolic ministry comes from Jesus Christ the Incarnate

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<sup>45</sup>Kirill wrote: "Whatever the interpretation of the term 'apostle' in the second century by the theologians, the very fact of the existence of this term testifies that the early Church saw a successive link between the ministry of the eyewitnesses of the Resurrected and the ministry in the Christian communities in the post-apostolic time" (Kirill, "Significance," p. 190).

<sup>46</sup>John D. Zizioulas, "Apostolic Continuity and Orthodox Theology: Towards A Synthesis of Two Perspectives," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1975), p. 77, emphasis in original.

<sup>47</sup>BOC, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup>*BEM*, II, #10, p. 21.

Logos and the ordained ministry from God through the apostolic succession.<sup>49</sup> Second, the ordained ministry not only fulfills "... in a representative way the mission of the church, but also is an organic function of the Church." Third, "orderly ordination implies however not only the transmission of the responsibilities but also a special charism."<sup>50</sup> Finally, the ordained ministry is a sacrament and therefore is distinct from the universal ministry of God's people.<sup>51</sup>

*BEM* states:

The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole. The succession is an expression of the permanence and, therefore, of the continuity of Christ's own mission in which the Church participates. Within the Church the ordained ministry has a particular task of preserving and actualizing the apostolic faith.<sup>52</sup>

In the responses of the Orthodox it seems that they object to what they perceive is an equation of apostolic tradition with apostolic succession as stated above.<sup>53</sup> The Orthodox in their responses would further like to link apostolic succession with being church. It is with this understanding that they make such statements as, "The continuity of the apostolic faith and unity in the churches is primarily seen in the episcopacy."<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the best summary concerning the subject of apostolic succession is found in the following:

We do not understand why, on the one hand, *the document affirms apostolic succession through episcopate* (Commentary 34) and on the other hand it asks for the recognition of apostolic succession of *the churches which have not retained or do not have episcopal succession* (M37), without stating precisely through what particular church structures apostolic succession could have been or could be preserved today.<sup>55</sup>

The question of apostolic succession is a complex issue. *BEM* attempts to equate the phrase "succession in the apostolic tradition" with apostolic succession, to which the Bulgarian Church objects.<sup>56</sup> It is here that we look at the subject of apostolic succession as being the visible manifestation of the apostolic tradition. The issues that are raised concerning apostolic succession in *BEM* are represented by the Orthodox claim that *BEM* attempts somehow to validate nonepiscopal churches as having an apostolic succession, but

... the fact remains that episcopacy is of the *esse*, rather than the *bene esse*, of the Church, to borrow from the Anglican formularies. Episcopal succes-

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<sup>49</sup>One response stated: "Orthodox believe that God himself bestows this unique gift upon the one ordained so that he might be able to bring the diverse gifts of the community into unity as one body" (OCA, #22, p. 22; see also Kirill, "Significance," p. 189).

<sup>50</sup>ROC, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 9; BOC, #1, p. 21.

<sup>52</sup>*BEM*, IV, #35, pp. 28-29.

<sup>53</sup>BOC, #5, p. 22.

<sup>54</sup>FOC, p. 28.

<sup>55</sup>ROMOC, p. 11, emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup>BOC, #5, p. 22.

sion is certainly one form of guarantee of true apostolic succession, and points toward the validity of ministry in and by the Church. It is required to regularize an errant ministry. Not by episcopal succession alone,<sup>57</sup> but certainly not without episcopal succession, can there be any discussion of the recovery of true unity in the one Church.<sup>58</sup>

This issue of episcopal succession for the Orthodox is a major ecclesiological position. Given the geographical and national structures of the Orthodox Church in the modern world, the "unity of the episcopate preserves the unity of local churches, since concord among the bishops ties, or rather welds all their churches into mutual fellowship."<sup>59</sup> The Orthodox, therefore, in their response to the question of apostolic succession are arguing an ecclesiological position that defines them as the only church and, further, maintains their unity in faith. It is only in this context that we can fully appreciate their sharp disagreement.

### *The Eucharist*

The eucharist has already been touched upon in each of the three preceding sections, but other important concerns need to be stated here that will relate the eucharist to the subject of ecclesiology. It has been commonly accepted that the Orthodox hold to a "eucharistic ecclesiology." Indeed, no Orthodox consideration of ecclesiology is complete without some attention to the eucharist.

This ecclesiological position is reaffirmed in the Orthodox Church in America's response to *BEM*: "It is in the eucharist that the church's unity is actualized, her apostolic faith expressed, her catholicity manifested, her holiness given. And it is in the eucharist that the church's theological vision is lived, her evangelical mission empowered, and the spiritual life of her members nurtured and renewed."<sup>60</sup> Can the Orthodox view ministry only in relation to the eucharist? In the Orthodox responses we find not only that ministry is linked to the eucharistic celebration but also that the understanding of the church is found in the eucharist. For example, we find:

. . . an important task for future careful study: which of the Christian families possesses the necessary and irrevocable ecclesiological qualities to be able to celebrate the holy eucharist and through it to nurture itself richly

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<sup>57</sup>"Indeed, this guarantee can be given neither by the activities of the bishops, nor by their personal qualities, nor by their solution of 'the task of preserving and actualizing' the faith. (There were heretics and people unworthy of their ministry among bishops.) The guarantee lies in the apostolic ministry itself, in its charisma" (Kirill, "Significance," p. 191).

<sup>58</sup>Robert G. Stephanopoulos, "The Lima Statement on Ministry," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1983), p. 278.

<sup>59</sup>Nicholas Afanassieff, "The Church Which Presides in Love," in Nicholas Afanassieff et al., *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church* (London: Faith Press, 1963), p. 63.

<sup>60</sup>OCA, #12, p. 18.

and to maintain its spiritual life, in order to be the sacramental image of Christ [*trópos*] and to be in an actual and effective communion with him.<sup>61</sup>

The eucharist according to the Orthodox is the unifying principle, and from this unity come all forms of ministry. We can thus say that the eucharist stands alone and that the forms of ministry are only expressions of this unity. In fact, *BEM* claims: "... a ministry of *episkope* is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every church needs this ministry of unity in some form in order to be the Church of God, the one body of Christ, a sign of the unity of all in the Kingdom."<sup>62</sup> It seems that *BEM*, pushed to its logical conclusion, would say that those churches not having an *episkope* lack a valid unity in the eucharist and, therefore, are not "church." This position, it would seem, would make the Orthodox rejoice. Is this not the spirit of the Orthodox Church in America's response, as noted above: "It is in the eucharist that the church's unity is actualized, her apostolic faith expressed, her catholicity manifested, her holiness given."<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

Drawing from the Orthodox responses to *BEM*, there seem to be four major concerns that arise from the discussion of ministry and ecclesiology, all of which have been interconnected above: the question of the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of all believers; the threefold pattern of bishop, priest, and deacon; apostolic succession; and the eucharist.

How do the Orthodox in their responses to *BEM* show a model for the church "to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?" The Orthodox have consistently claimed in their responses that there is no church without having apostolic succession and a threefold ministry. The Orthodox make a sharp distinction between ministry in the church and the ordained ministry of the Orthodox Church. One of the areas where the Orthodox seem to agree with *BEM* concerns the relationship between the threefold pattern and apostolic ministry. The emphasis for the Orthodox, however, is not to see the threefold pattern in terms of tasks, aspects, and functions but, rather, as a manifestation of the ontological order of the church where "The eucharist exists as the sacrament of Christ himself and through it—by the power of the Holy Spirit—members of the Church are really incorporated into Christ and become co-participants in the history of salvation."<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, the Orthodox responses raise many questions concerning the ecclesiological implications of *BEM*. I have only touched upon the four

<sup>61</sup>BOC, #9, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup>*BEM*, III, #23, p. 25.

<sup>63</sup>OCA, #12, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup>Kirill, "Significance," p. 185.

most prominent. Although we find mixed reactions from the Orthodox toward *BEM*, most of the responses have been favorable. The fact that the Orthodox were full participants at Lima (1982) and did not vote there in the negative shows that there are significant areas of ecclesiological agreement between the Orthodox and the *BEM* document. As the Orthodox themselves claim, *BEM* is truly a “. . . rediscovery of the unity of the church by Christians now sadly divided, a unity which we Orthodox believe to be essentially preserved within the Orthodox Church despite our many sins and human divisions.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>OCA, #2, p. 15.

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